

*9/11 Recovery Worker's With Damaged Lungs Went Through Two Oxygen Tanks While Waiting for Wife's Naturalization Appointment*

Central Islip, NY— Thursday, Congressman Steve Israel (D-Huntington) will join with a group of 9/11 Recovery Workers at the home of fellow worker whose lungs were damaged working at the WTC site. While waiting for the key naturalization interview to secure citizenship for his Columbian wife, he ran through two oxygen tanks and was forced to leave, missing the appointment. His wife was denied citizenship. Rep. Israel announced that he was able to get the case re-opened and secure her citizenship.

“When Chris Longley saw his community in need after the towers fell, he didn’t hesitate, he just went to help,” Israel said. “But when it was our turn to help him, he faced a bureaucratic roadblock. Chris and his family deserved better. I’m sorry it took a Congressman’s help to make things right, but I’m proud I was able to help a man who’s given so much for our community.”

In 2001, Christopher Longley owned a bottled water company, Water Pure and Simple, and immediately following the attack on the WTC volunteered his time and product to the rescue efforts by remaining on the WTC site for weeks to provide free water to the men and women working on the recovery efforts. As a result, Mr. Longley developed serious lung disease. He breathes with assistance of oxygen tanks 24/7 and is currently on the waiting list for a double-lung transplant.

Chris Longley is married to Melida Gutierrez Longley, a Columbian citizen. In June of this year, Mr. Longley and his wife, Melida Gutierrez Longley, went to a naturalization interview at the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) in Manhattan. When they arrived for the interview, they were told that Mrs. Longley’s file could not be found and they would have to wait. Mr. and Mrs. Longley waited so long for the interview that Mr. Longley had almost finished the 2 tanks of oxygen he had brought with him. When they informed the USCIS officer of the situation, they still would not accommodate them. Eventually, Mr. Longley ran out of oxygen and the Longley’s had to leave without being interviewed. Approximately a week later, Mrs. Longley received a notice denying her naturalization application.

Mr. Longley contacted Congressman Steve Israel who was able to get the case re-opened. Israel's office pointed to a number of factual errors in Mrs. Longley's file—errors that would have been corrected during the naturalization interview—and explained Mr. Longley's health condition. Mrs. Longley's case was re-opened and approved. She is now scheduled to take her naturalization oath on August 19, 2010 at the Eastern District Court.

At the announcement Thursday, Rep. Israel and the Longley family were joined by other 9/11 responders. The plight of 9/11 recovery workers and first responders has been in the news recently as Congress has considered The 9/11 Health and Compensation Act. The bill would provide health care for those exposed to toxins released by the collapse of the World Trade Center towers. When considered last week the bill did not reach the necessary, two-thirds majority required for passage necessary under the expedient procedure by which it was brought to the floor for a vote. However, the strong majority of 255-159 makes it likely that the bill will garner majority support when it is brought to the floor again in the fall.